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CHAPTER XII

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By T. PEISKER, Ph.D., Privatdocent and Librarian, Graz

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(B)

ATTILA

The Huns, who were divided into numerous distinct tribes ruled by separate princes, had since the beginning of the fifth century begun to draw together into a closer political union. King Rua (Rugilas) had already united a large part of the nation under his sceptre; he ruled especially over the tribes that inhabited the plains of Hungary. Numerous alien barbaric peoples (Slavs, Germans, Sarmatians, etc.) were under his sway. The Eastern Empire paid him a yearly tribute. He was on friendly terms with Aëtius, the general of the Western Empire, who on this account gave up to him a part of Pannonia, the province of Savia. Rua's successors were his nephews, Bleda and Attila, the sons of Mundzuk (c. 433).

They first of all reigned jointly, each ruling over a definite number of tribes but maintaining the unity of their empire, while in questions of foreign politics both rulers co-operated. Bleda's personality traditionally fades into obscurity beside Attila's. Attila was hideous to look upon, little, broad-shouldered, with big head, flat nose, and scanty beard. He was covetous, vain, and, like all despots, careful in the preservation of the outward appearance of dignity; he was superstitious, unable to read or write, but of penetrating intellect, he was cunning, audacious, and skilled in all the arts of diplomacy. He is most fitly compared to the formidable Mongol king, Chinghiz Khan; like him he was a mere conqueror who aimed at destruction and plunder; his supremacy had therefore only the effect of a devastating tornado, not that of a purifying thunderstorm which wakes Nature to new life. Certainly he did not rival the Mongol in cruelty and violence; a wise calculation prevented him from totally laying waste the territory given over to him; he respected the law of nations and could be just and magnanimous towards his enemies. Though surrounded by great pomp he remained simple and moderate in his manner of life; he would sit at meals with a stern and earnest countenance, without taking any part in the revelry going on around him.

The policy of concentrating authority within the nation and extending it externally which was introduced by Rua was consciously developed by Bleda and Attila, especially by the latter after he had in 444 or 445 attained to exclusive dominion by setting aside his brother and co-ruler. About the year 435 the Sorasgi, possibly a people of Turkish origin domiciled in South Russia, as well as other "Scythian" races, were subdued. The Akatziri, living in the district to

the north of the Black Sea, who hitherto had been in alliance with the Huns, were obliged to acknowledge Attila's rule, and he placed his eldest son Ellak at their head as sub-king (c. 447). The king of the Huns even thought of extending the eastern frontier of his empire to Media and Persia. Among the barbarians tributary to him were, besides, the Alani (on the Don), numerous Slav tribes, some of which lived east of the Vistula while others, driven out by the Huns, had settled in the Danubian lands, as had in particular, the Teutons of the Danube basin: Gepidae, Ostrogoths, Heruli, Rugii, Sciri, Turcilingi, Suevi (Quadi). Certainly other names of German tribes are mentioned as under Attila's dominion: Marcomanni, Bastarnae, Burgundians, Bructeri, Franks (Ripuarii), and perhaps Alemanni on the Neckar, but it is doubtful to whom they were subject. The Burgundians (on the east Rhine) who had previously in the year 430 successfully repelled a Hunnic host, the Bructeri (between the Lippe and the Ruhr), the Franks and Germans on the Neckar must have voluntarily joined the Huns during the great march to Gaul (451), so that we are scarcely justified in advancing the western frontier of the Huns as far as the Rhine. The Germans occupy a conspicuous place in the circle around Attila; it is related of Ardaric, the king of the Gepidae, that he enjoyed especial consideration from Attila on account of his fidelity, and that his advice was not without influence on the decisions of the king of the Huns. Among his trusted counsellors is mentioned, besides, the famous warrior prince of the Sciri, Edeco (Edica), Odovacar's father, who in the year 449 was sent to Constantinople as ambassador. The Ostrogoth king Walamir also is said — though by a biassed and not unimpeachable authority (Jordanes) — to have enjoyed Attila's favour. Thus the German peoples mostly maintained their autonomy and were generally only obliged to serve in the army, while other inferior subject races, in particular the Slavs, forfeited their independence and were compelled to feed their rulers with the produce of their farms and cattle. Yet Attila looked upon all subjugated peoples as his slaves and asserted an absolute right of disposing of their life and property. All attempts to withdraw from his sovereignty he punished with terrible cruelty; the demand for the delivery of fugitives therefore played an important part in his negotiations with the Romans.

We are, as is natural, most accurately informed of his relations with the two halves of the Roman Empire. Like Rua Attila maintained a friendship with Aëtius, at whose disposal he repeatedly placed Hunnish mercenaries. This relationship was partly brought about by personal conditions, partly by the endeavour of Attila to divide the Roman power. With such auxiliaries the general of the Western Empire destroyed at Worms (435-436) the Burgundian kingdom of legendary fame — an event which later tradition and saga have turned into an expedition of Attila's against the Burgundians. Numbers of Huns served in the Roman Army which, in the same way, in 436-439 fought against the

Visigoths. On his side Aëtius sent to the king a learned Roman scribe, Constantius, as private secretary and gave him his own son, Carpilio, as hostage, for which in return he was honoured with gifts. The office, also, of a *magister militum* which Attila held he seems to have obtained through the Western Empire. The tribute which was paid to him from thence was disguised under the name of a salary as Roman General-in-chief. But at the end of the year 440 serious troubles already disturbed these relations, because Attila repeatedly annoyed the Western Empire and terrified it with threats under the pretext that fugitives from his dominion had found refuge there.

The same degrading treatment must have befallen the Eastern Roman Empire which was under the sovereignty of the incapable Emperor Theodosius II. A complete overthrow and destruction of the Eastern Empire was not Attila's intention. His policy on the contrary aimed at keeping it, by continual extortions of money and actual depredations, in a state of permanent weakness and incapacity to resist. And as he insisted that all deserters should be given up to him he deprived the Romans of the means of strengthening their army by recruiting among the barbaric peoples of the Danube lands. These leading ideas came clearly to light at once in the first treaty which the two kings of the Huns concluded with the Emperor soon after their accession (c. 433). It was agreed that the Romans should no longer receive fugitives from the Huns and that these, as well as the Roman prisoners of war who had escaped from the country of the Huns, should be given up unless a ransom was paid for each of the latter. Besides, the Emperor must not assist any barbarian people that was fighting against the Huns; between both the kingdoms there was to be free commercial intercourse; the tribute of the Romans was doubled and raised to 700 lbs. of gold. It was clear that the Huns would not be contented with success so easily gained; if they nevertheless kept the peace for eight years, it was only because they were occupied with the subjection of the various Scythian peoples to the north of the Danube. In the year 441 they were on the war-path and slaughtered the Romans who had come on account of a market to the bank of the Danube. A direct reason for the opening of hostilities was given to them by the East Roman expedition against the Vandals which had occasioned a withdrawal of frontier troops. This coincidence of events has given rise to the groundless supposition that Gaiseric and Attila had at that time formed an alliance. To the Emperor's expostulation the kings replied that the Romans had not paid the tribute regularly, had sheltered deserters, and also that the bishop of Margus (Pussarovitz) had robbed the Hunnish royal graves of their treasures, and they threatened him with a continuation of the war unless the fugitives and the bishop were handed over to them. As the imperial envoys refused everything the Huns captured the Danube forts Ratiaria, Viminacium,

Singidunum (Belgrade) and Margus (the last through the treachery of the bishop, who was afraid of being delivered up) and pressed, devastating as they went, into the interior of the Balkan lands as far as the neighbourhood of Constantinople, where they conquered cities like Naissus (Nisch), Philippopolis and Arcadiopolis. Other Hunnish bands joined with the Persians made an inroad at the same time over the Caucasus into the frontier lands of the Eastern Empire. The Roman army which had in the meantime been called from Sicily by Theodosius was decisively beaten in the Thracian Chersonesus. The kings of the Huns dictated peace; and its conditions were still more disgraceful than before: — the yearly tribute was raised to 2100 lbs. of gold besides the stipulation of the payment of an indemnity of 6000 lbs. of gold, and the surrender of fugitives was insisted upon (443).

Already in the year 447 the Huns invaded once more, and again brought the most terrible calamities upon the Balkan lands. Arnegisclus, the general who opposed the enemy, was beaten and killed after valiant resistance on the river Utus (Wid) in Lower Moesia, after which the Hunnish cavalry pressed up the valley of the river Margus (Morava) and through Thessaly as far as Thermopylae. Some 70 cities and fortresses are said to have fallen victims to them at that time. When in the year 448 peace was again concluded, Attila demanded that besides the usual money payments a broad tract of a five days' journey on the right bank of the Danube from Singidunum to Novae (Šistova) should be left waste; the boundary was placed at Naissus. But even now Attila would not leave the Emperor at peace. Embassy after embassy went to Constantinople and, on the standing pretext that not all deserters had yet been delivered up, continually asserted fresh humiliating claims, the king being however chiefly desirous of giving his messengers an opportunity of enriching themselves with the customary gifts. The Eastern Empire was near a financial collapse; as it could not exert itself to armed resistance the thought came to the Imperial Government, that is to say to the court eunuch Chrysaphius in particular, of getting rid of the king of the Huns by murder. For this deed the co-operation of the Scirian prince Edeco was sought: he declared himself ready to assist but immediately betrayed the plan to Attila. The king revenged himself only by scorning the despicable enemy; the Roman envoys who had come with Edeco to him, amongst whom was the historian Priscus, he allowed to withdraw, respecting the law of nations; he promised besides to maintain the peace and give up the waste frontier territory on the Danube, and he did not once press the demand, made in his first anger, that Chrysaphius should be put to death. But he sent word to the Emperor that as Attila was a king's son so was Theodosius an emperor's son, but that as the latter had rendered himself tributary to the former he thus became his slave and that it was a shameful action that he, as such, should aim at the life of his master

(449?). Attila might rightly consider himself the lord of the whole Roman Empire. His authority had been considerably enhanced among his own people by the discovery, about that time, of a sword buried in the ground which was regarded as the weapon of the god of war.

It was not until Theodosius died (28 July 450) that these wretched conditions altered. His successor, the efficient Emperor Marcian, refused, as soon as he succeeded to the throne, to continue the payment of the tribute to the king of the Huns, and the Western Empire followed his example. The outbreak of war was also due to the conduct of Gratia Justa Honoria, the sister of the Western Emperor Valentinian. She secretly offered herself as wife to the king of the Huns, but the fulfilment of the offer was refused because Attila demanded that half of the Western Empire should be given up to her as her inheritance from her father. Attila hereupon determined to take possession of the Western Empire and of Gaul first of all, for here he might reckon with certainty on the support of the (Ripuarian) Franks who, being split up into two sections on account of dynastic hostilities, called for his intervention, and he could in all probability count on at least the benevolent neutrality of the Visigoths. The story that Gaiseric, out of fear of Theodoric's vengeance, stirred up Attila to make war against the Visigoths, is certainly a fable, for the African kingdom had nothing to fear from an attack on this side; nevertheless the Vandal king may have had a hand in the matter in order to weaken the West Roman Empire still further. Supposing, however, an agreement between the Goths and the Romans to be possible, Attila wrote to Theodoric as well as to the Western Emperor that he was not going to take the field against them but against their enemies. The history of the Hunnic expedition which ended in Attila's defeat on the Campus Mauriacus near Troyes (451) has already been told in another connexion, p. 280. Without being followed by the victors the Hunnic army returned to Hungary. Attila did not venture to repeat the expedition into Gaul; on the contrary, in the following year after having made good his losses he turned towards Italy where he had not to fear Germanic heroism.

Without encountering any resistance the Hunnic army crossed the Julian Alps in the spring of 452. After a long siege Aquileia was taken by storm and destroyed; after which the most important fortresses of Upper Italy, with the exception of Ravenna, easily fell into the hands of the enemy. A great many of the inhabitants of the terribly devastated country sought refuge on the unassailable islands of the lagoons along the Adriatic coast. Yet the real foundation of Venice which tradition has connected with the Hunnic invasion can only be traced back to the invasion of the Lombards (568). After this Attila bethought himself of marching against Rome, but famine and disease, which broke out in his army, and the arrival in Italy of succour from the Eastern Empire, as well as superstitious fear, since the Visigoth

king Alaric had died shortly after his capture of the Eternal City, kept him from carrying out his plan. When therefore an embassy of the Romans led by Pope Leo I appeared in his camp on the Mincio to induce him to withdraw, he willingly shewed himself ready to conclude peace and retire. A contemporary, the chronicler Prosper Tiro, who at that time was living in the papal service at Rome, has ascribed the retreat of the "scourge of God" to the influence of Leo's powerful personality, and later ecclesiastical tradition has naturally further enhanced the holy man's ostensible service and adorned it with all manner of supernatural circumstances. But a dispassionate historical inspection will not allow us to ascribe the saving of Italy solely to the influence of the Pope. Having returned home Attila demanded of Marcian the tribute paid by Theodosius, and on the refusal of the Emperor prepared for war against Eastern Rome. But his sudden death prevented the realisation of his scheme: he died of hemorrhage when he was celebrating his wedding (453) with a maiden named Ildico, the Kriemhild of the Nibelungenlied (the name is a diminutive of Hilde). The inheritance was divided among his sons, those mentioned by name being Ellak, Dengisich, and Ernac the youngest, Attila's favourite. But with this was foreshadowed the downfall of the Hunnic power, which was too much dependent on the personal quality of its leader to be able to endure.

Of the domestic life and polity of the Huns we have also accurate knowledge through the genuine fragment of Priscus. The king's headquarters were on the Hungarian steppe between the Theiss and Körös and covered a large area which was enclosed by a circular wooden fence. In the middle stood the royal residence also fenced round, a wooden erection consisting of one single hall, Attila's private and public dwelling, of ingenious architecture and furnished within with great magnificence.¹ Among the king's circle the *logades* were prominent, a nobility founded on birth and service; these enjoyed the highest consideration with the ruler and the right to choose from the booty the best spoils and the richest prisoners, and they formed a kind of council of state. Out of their midst the body-guard, the military leaders, and the envoys were taken. The highest position amongst them was occupied by Onegesius, Attila's right hand and first minister, who lived in a palace at the entrance to the court residence. Besides Huns there were also Germans and Romans among the *logades*, who on account of their intelligence and culture enjoyed especial consideration. At the king's Court therefore the Latin and Gothic tongues were in predominant use together with the Hunnic. Attila ruled over his people in a wholly patriarchal manner; the administration of justice was executed through him personally in the simplest way, always just without respect of persons.

¹ Stephani gives a plan of the encampment. *Der älteste deutsche Wohnbau und seine Einrichtung*, Leipsic, 1902, I. pp. 172 ff.

The freedom and legal protection which every subject enjoyed caused many a Roman to leave his home and settle with the uncivilised barbarians who knew no kind of taxation. The Huns kept, as before, their character as nomadic horsemen; they were in their element on the steppes; life in towns was repugnant to them. Justly appreciating these conditions Attila had made no attempt to effect a change in the mode of life of his people, and never thought of removing to civilised districts and setting up there a new State. His object was fully attained by keeping the Romans in subjection and making them fill his treasury.

CHAPTER XII (B)

ATTILA

I. SOURCES

Our chief authority is the Byzantine historian Priscus, whose description of the period c. 440-472 is based on his own experiences and on reliable accounts, but whose work has unfortunately only come down to us in fragments (Müller's *PHG. See Gen. Bibl.*, iv, 1851, p. 71 ff.; v [1871], p. 24 ff. De Boor, *Excerpta de legationibus*, i, p. 121 ff., ii, p. 575 ff. Berlin 1903).

A long fragment (No. 8) contains the description of the journey on which he accompanied an Embassy from the Eastern Empire to the Court of the king of the Huns in Hungary.

Priscus was also the principal source for the later Byzantine historians as well as for Cassiodorus' History of the Goths, which is only preserved in the abstract made by Jordanes (*Getica*, ed. Mommsen: *MGH, auct. ant.*, v).

Supplementary contemporary accounts independent of Priscus, are given in the Chronicle of Marcellinus Comes (according to the East-Roman Annals) (*MGH, auct. ant.*, xi), the poems of Apollinaris Sidonius (ditto, viii), the Italian Consular Fasti (ditto, ix), the Chronicle of Prosper Tiro and Hydatius (ditto, ix, xi), as well as the South Gallic Chronicle up to 452 (ditto, ix).

II. LITERATURE

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Compare also the literary accounts in Chevalier, *Répertoire*; *see Gen. Bibl.* Bio-Bibliographie, i, col. 360-1; Topo-Bibliogr., ii col. 1877.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF LEADING EVENTS MENTIONED IN THIS VOLUME

- 284 Election of Diocletian (17 Sept.).
- 297 Peace with Persia : acquisition of the five provinces.
- 303 The Great Persecution (24 Feb.).
- 305 Abdication of Diocletian (1 May).
- 306 Elevation of Constantine at York.
- 309-380 Reign of Sapor II in Persia.
- 311 Edict of Toleration and death of Galerius.
- 312 Battle of Saxa Rubra (28 Sept.)
Edict of Milan.
- 323 Battle of Chrysopolis (Sept.).
- 325 Council of Nicaea.
- 328-373 Athanasius Bishop of Alexandria.
- 330 Foundation of Constantinople.
- 337 Death of Constantine (22 May).
War with Persia.
- 339 Second Exile of Athanasius.
- 341 Council of the Dedication at Antioch.
- 343 Council of Sardica.
- 346 Return of Athanasius.
- 350 Revolt of Magnentius.
- 352 Battle of Mursa.
- 355 Julian made Caesar for Gaul.
- 356 Third Exile of Athanasius.
- 357 Battle of Argentoratum.
- 359 Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia.
- 360 Mutiny at Paris : Julian proclaimed Augustus.
Council of Constantinople.
- 361-363 Julian Emperor.
- 363-364 Jovian Emperor. Peace with Persia : cession of the five provinces.
- 364 Valentinian and Valens Emperors.
- 369 Count Theodosius in Britain
- 374-397 Ambrose Bishop of Milan.
- 375-383 Gratian Emperor in the West.
- 376 Passage of the Danube by the Goths.
- 378 Battle of Hadrianople (9 Aug.).
- 379-395 Reign of Theodosius.

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- 381 Council of Constantinople.
 383-388 Usurpation of Maximus.
 386 Execution of Priscillian.
 390 Destruction of the Serapeum.
 392 Revolt of Arbogast.
 394 Battle of the Frigidus (6 Sept.).
 395 Arcadius and Honorius Emperors.
 400 Revolt of Gannas.
 402 Battle of Pollentia.
 406 Passage of the Rhine by the Germans (31 Dec.).
 407 Withdrawal of the legions from Britain.
 408-450 Reign of Theodosius II in the East.
 408 Mutiny at Pavia. Execution of Stilicho.
 410 Sack of Rome by Alaric (23 Aug.).
 412 The Visigoths in Gaul.
 418 Rescript of Honorius to Agricola.
 425-455 Valentinian III Emperor in the West.
 429 The Vandals in Africa.
 430 Death of Augustine.
 431 Council of Ephesus.
 433 *Codex Theodosianus*. Legal separation of East and West.
 439 Capture of Carthage by the Vandals.
 440-461 Pope Leo I.
 445 Edict of Valentinian III.
 449 The *Latrocinium* at Ephesus.
 c. 449 Traditional date of Hengest and Horsa.
 450-458 Marcian Emperor in the East.
 451 Council of Chalcedon.
 Battle of the Mauriac Plain.
 452 Destruction of Aquileia by Attila. Embassy of Pope Leo.
 454 Assassination of Aetius.
 455 Sack of Rome by Gaiseric.
 457-461 Reign of Majorian in the West.
 468 Failure of Basiliscus before Carthage.
 472 Capture of Rome by Ricimer.
 474-491 Zeno Emperor in the East.
 476 Deposition of Romulus Augustulus.
 (Odoacer master of Italy till 493).
 481 The *Henoticon* of Zeno. Schism in the Church.
 481-511 Reign of Clovis.
 486 Clovis defeats Syagrius.
 491-518 Anastasius Emperor.
 493-526 Reign of Theodoric in Italy.
 507 Battle of Vouglé. Clovis conquers Aquitaine.
 518 Justin Emperor. End of the Schism.
 533 Conquest of Africa by Belisarius.
 597 Landing of Augustine.
 Death of Columba (9 June).